NOTICE OF GENERAL MEETING

The seventh General Meeting of the Society for 1981 will be held in the Museum Education Building, North Terrace, Adelaide at

8.00PM MONDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER, 1981

AGENDA

1. Apologies.

2. Minutes of Previous General Meeting.
   Minutes of the previous General Meeting, held Monday, 24 August, 1981 to be confirmed. A copy of these minutes is attached.

3. New Members.
   No new members have been elected to the Society:

4. Papers and Journals.
   Papers and Journals from other Societies and Organizations will be tabled at the meeting.

5. Business.

6. FILM
   Members and Friends of the Society have been invited by the Aboriginal Task Force, to a private screening of the unedited version of the film dealing with sacred grounds of the Kimberley's Western Australia, entitled:-

   ON SACRED GROUND

   This film, banned in Western Australia and outside Australia, was commissioned by the Aboriginal Affairs Department and produced by Film Australia.

7. Supper.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction and Background.

The aim of the archaeologist is to re-discover a people's way of life that has now changed or vanished. Early historical accounts are valuable for reconstructing past ways of life but there are many details lacking. These the archaeologist can at times make good, through his study of the imperishable remains. In doing this he calls upon a wide range of scientific studies, ranging from geomorphology to modern studies of fish and mollusc populations. In South Australia all this work is in its infancy.

In 1979 a number of factors came together which resulted in our Society undertaking an archaeological survey of sections of the coast and plains south of Adelaide. Many members are familiar with the project and its aims, but others may appreciate a brief outline.

For some time various members of the Committee had felt it desirable that the Society pursue some form of active field work, both as a means of expanding our activities to meet the tastes of more members, and as an active contribution to the archaeology of the state. In the process members would gain experience in the techniques of field reconnaissance and recording. In his Presidential address of 1978 Bob Ellis underlined the value of such an undertaking and with enthusiastic secretarial prodding, planning began.

It was decided to investigate the Aldinga Scrub and its surroundings, by a systematic gridding of the Reserve and the adjoining coastline.

The area was of known archaeological interest, with two campsites recorded there, in addition to native wells and a skin curing site reported by N.B. Tindale just to the south of the Scrub. An additional attraction of this area was the fact that it had remained substantially unchanged since European intrusion into the area, and so the chances of locating undisturbed sites seemed good.

The planning committee felt it was necessary to place this immediate field work in a wider archaeological and geographic context and so throughout the year checks were made of other sites already recorded, and their condition noted. Generally these sites were coastal so the general emphasis of the work in 1979 was in this environmental area. Before we can really understand the prehistoric settlement patterns on the coast and plains south of Adelaide it will be necessary to survey systematically other environmental zones such as the foot-hills and riverine areas. This part of the project lies ahead of us.

In order to finance modest field costs, such as photographs, accommodation at Camp Kursa, and the production of a report, a grant was sought, and duly received, from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies. We gratefully acknowledge this assistance.

2. The Geographic Setting.

The choice of the boundaries for the survey took into account the availability of data regarding the location of sites, the variety of ecological zones presented, and the former territory of the Kaurna at the time of European settlement.

The Mount Lofty watershed marks the eastern boundary of the survey area. The northern limits of the investigation are determined by the southward sprawl of Adelaide, and to the west by the placid waters of St. Vincent's Gulf, as far south as Rapid Bay.

Within this area several ecological zones can be discerned, each offering important contributions to the welfare of prehistoric Man. Because of their importance in the understanding of former land-use patterns they are discussed briefly in the following pages.
Foothills

The watershed of the Mount Lofties is the eastern boundary of the survey area. It was also the territorial boundary of the Kaurna, the tribe occupying this stretch of country in the nineteenth century. Formed by a series of uplifts during the Palaeozoic and Cainozoic periods, the Mount Lofties escarpment rises steeply to between 300 and 400 metres (Twidle, 1978:45-48). This area in its natural condition supported a range of Eucalypts, species being determined by local conditions of slope and soil. The understorey included wattles, Olearia, and the large tussocks of the grass-tree, Xanthorrhoea. Sedges and annuals, flowers and grasses, were a common feature of the ground layer.

As an indication of the extent of these forested hills, Teichelmann and Schurmann (1840:75) cite the Aboriginal word Mullawirra as referring to the forest east of the Aldinga Plain, suggesting that these now bare hills were once tree-covered.

Riverine Zone

The deeply dissected scarp is the source of many streams which flow westwards across the narrow alluvial plains to the Gulf. During the hot summer months the majority of these streams cease to flow and their mouths are blocked by sand. Pools of still water often remain for much of the summer period. Those streams, such as the Onkaparinga River or Bungala Creek, that have a sufficiently large catchment or are spring fed, usually continue to flow.

The age of the major river valleys is considerable but a definite time range has not been assigned to them (Twidle, 1978:51). The banks of these streams are generally marked by lines of Eucalypts, the Red River Gum with its great girth and mottled white trunk being the most attractive species present.

Coastal Plains

The coastal plains have been formed by alluvial deposition over a considerable period of time. The major units of the survey are the Willunga and Noarlunga Plains. Both had been cleared for cultivation by the end of the nineteenth century but even prior to clearing these plains presented a park-like appearance. In 1837 Morphett (quoted Lange, 1978:99) described the country in the vicinity of Aldinga as:

...sloping grassland in front without
a single tree for 3 or 4 miles square,
of a beautifully bright green in winter
and spring, and a golden colour during
the hotter months...

Informants from this area speak of Sheoaks (Casuarina) and Native Pine (Callitris) growing on this plain in the later nineteenth century.

The plains bear the brunt of the summer heat, with low rainfall and high temperatures, but experience correspondingly milder winter conditions (Schwerdtfeger, 1978:77-78;83-85) than the hills area.

Lagoonal and Swampyl Areas

Associated with the coastal plains, generally close to the debouchure of creeks, were some areas of low-lying country frequently inundated. The most northerly and extensive of these is an area once known as the Cowandilla Plains, lying behind the recent dune systems between the Port River and Glenelg. It included the area known as Reedbeds at the mouth of the River Torrens (Holmes and Iverson, 1978:91). Long since drained and developed, this area is lost to modern investigation, but was important to early archaeology in the Adelaide region.

Most swampy areas are more restricted in size, like the area south of Yankalilla Creek where about two hectares of low-lying land are subject to flooding, and bear Juncus as its main vegetation cover.

The drainage system of the Willunga Plain has largely atrophied and an area of swamp used to develop in the area north-east of Aldinga Beach where recent dune development cut off drainage into the sea. Waters built up during the winter months and drained southwards around the dune system, which extended over a mile inland, and was covered in dense scrub. To the
south of this area, known as the Aldinga Scrub, two lagoons existed. Known as the Blue Lagoon and the Washpool, Gardiner (Gardiner, 1973:12) asserts that these contained fresh water, except when high seas broke over the Washpool's protecting sand-bar during winter storms and Blue Lagoon was originally 3 to 6 metres deep. Despite various attempts at drainage the Blue Lagoon survived until after World War II, although reduced to only slightly more than a metre in depth as a result of siltation. Today the outlines of both are distinct as marshy areas bearing little vegetation. During the very wet winter of 1981 both areas filled again black swans settled on them.

These lagoons appear to be unique in the survey area. Swampland areas at the mouths of the Sturt and Onkaparinga Rivers are saline and subject to tidal influences.

Coastal Headlands

The low-lying areas are intersected by fingers of higher undulating land reaching out from the main body of the Mount Lofties. Formed by uplifting, these upland areas have been eroded to form low cliffs where they are intersected by the sea. They now present an attractive sight—rolling, grassed hills extending to the edge of the sea. Once they probably bore scrub vegetation which included Peppermint (E. odorata), Sheepocks (Casuarina stricta), Tea-trees (Melaleuca), Quandongs (Eucarya acuminata), Native Cherries (Eucarpus cupressiformis) and Kangaroo Bush (Acacia armata) such as Cleland describes as covering the hills at Hallett's Cove in the twenties (Fenner and Cleland, 1935:15). Such cover would have provided a welcome wind-break on these exposed heights.

Coastal Dunes

The coastline south of Adelaide consists of a series of sandy beaches, separated by rocky headlands and flanked by sand-dunes. These ranged in height from 3 to 4 metres at Normanville to the 20 metres reported for Moana (Howchin, 1934:11). The most recent of these dunes are a glistening white and have formed during the past 4,000 years. Where vegetation has been destroyed by stock and trampling the dunes have suffered serious erosion, resulting in large deflation hollows and mass movement. However, there remains areas where the vegetation still stabilises much of the dune system. Normanville is the best example, although small areas of stabilised dunes exist, for instance, at Aldinga Beach. Of the long list of dune species given by Cleland in 1935 (Fenner and Cleland, 1935:8-10) those most evident today are Olearia eliaria, a small composite, occasional Acacia bushes, tufts of Scirpus modosus and Juncus in the low-lying swales, while the spreading branches of Spinifex hirsutus frequently bind sand on the seaward side of the dunes. Pig face (Mesembrianthemum aequilaterale) similarly acts as a binding agent in areas more protected from salt spray. Other flowering species and creepers such as the showy Kennedia prostrata occur on some of the more stable dunes.

Where erosion has occurred the earlier phases of dune development are revealed. The sequence is well developed at Moana where a reddish-yellow sand overlies the white sands. This, in turn, is underlain by pinkish sands with a much higher clay content. The latter are of Pleistocene age and the reddish-yellow sands appear to have developed towards the end of that period. Generally, the reddish-yellow sands are believed to have been deposited between 12,000 and 6,000 years ago and to represent changes in the conditions of deposition. Sometimes they appear to be the earlier sands re-worked (J. Firman, pers. comm. Dec. 1979). This sequence is also present at Aldinga Beach, where it appears to extend inland for at least several hundred metres.

Both the reddish-yellow and white sands contain occupational material, but to date none has been found in the pinkish sands.

In many ways this strip of coastal dunes would have been the least pleasant place in which to live, experiencing extremes of weather and lacking the shelter of timbered country. In summer it is subjected to the
highest mean temperatures, despite the occurrence of sea breezes in the evenings. Water becomes scarce in the hottest months; wells dug in the sand and pools in the non-perennial streams become the main sources, although the latter would be brackish to saline. In winter the coast is slightly drier with higher temperatures than other zones in the survey, but lacks the shelter of substantial trees which would furnish protection and fire-wood.

3. The Advent of the Europeans.

The first European settlers arrived on the plains in 1836 and by 1840 the land as far south as Mt. Terrible had been surveyed and divided into tidy sections for European purchase (Manuscript map, 1840). The only indications on this map of the dispossessed owners are a series of "native tracks" marked because of their relevance to road makers. Grazing and subsequently farming, quickly became the main activities on the plains, the sheep displacing the kangaroo and emu as surely as the single furrow plough replaced the digging stick.

Yet some small family groups of Aborigines continued to live in the more isolated areas, such as the Aldinga Scrub. It was here that the presence of a few wurlies worried Bishop Short sufficiently for him to organise the removal of their owners to Poonindie, an Aboriginal institution established on the Eyre Peninsula in 1850. This appears to have marked the end of the local Kurna people, for recollections of early residents interviewed in 1979 indicate that whilst Aborigines were present in the vicinity of the Scrub until late in the nineteenth century, these people were from Goolwa. The best recollections were from Mr. How who remembers seeing Aborigines at Port Willunga where groups of 20 or 30 camped in the sand-dunes behind Snapper Point, where they made baskets from reeds and fished with spears on the reefs.

Whilst the impact of Europeans on the area as a whole was immense, it seems that around Aldinga Beach little change occurred; the Scrub remained virtually unaltered apart from the ring-barking of the Red Gums close to the swamp in the north-east, and the gathering of fire-wood and wattle bark for tanning. Some vegetables and fruits were planted on the margins in the 1920's and 1930's. The plains appear to have always been fairly open, but early settlers recollect the removal of Sheoaks from here. The once wooded hills have obviously been radically changed, as they now stand quite denuded.

The local residents remember large numbers of brown snakes, goannas, opussums and water-fowl - ducks, geese, swans and pelicans. These are indications of the former fauna in the area, but the absence of emus and the rarity of browsers like the kangaroo indicate the extent to which sheep and cattle had taken over. Amongst fish, mulloway were in abundance in the 1920's, but are now quite scarce.

With the rapid expansion of Adelaide southwards in the past two decades, and the blossoming of beach resorts along the southern coast, there have been radical changes to the environment: hill-sides are now forests of tile and antennae, and many a sand-dune bears a similar growth. Other dunes have been devegetated and the wind has eroded, or the sand miners have removed, them. Certainly the area has seen rapid development and is constantly under pressure as a residential and recreational zone.

Its prehistory is in great danger of being lost, so the efforts of 1979 were of great importance as an attempt to record in detail the present situation, and to assess future avenues of research, protection and conservation.

Mrs. Eunice Robinson interviewed a number of early residents at Aldinga, and unless otherwise indicated, this is the source of local information.
References


